

---

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

# An End in Itself?

*“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality”<sup>1</sup>.*

**T**he European Commission defines gender mainstreaming as: *“integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with a view to promoting equality between women and men. It means assessing how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men – and taking responsibility to re-address them if necessary”<sup>2</sup>.* Two similar, but still different, definitions of gender mainstreaming demonstrate the complexity of this policy. The European



**Lejla  
Gačanica**

*PhD Researcher,  
Faculty of Law,  
University of  
Mostar, Bosnia and  
Herzegovina*

*Legal Advisor,  
Initiative Women  
Citizens for  
Constitutional  
Reform*

Union’s perspective is an important one when considering efficiency and possible application on gender mainstreaming (especially bearing in mind the transposition process when it comes to EU laws and Member States).

A number of questions served as impetus for this paper: *“Who are these policies intended for?”*, *“Who understands this type of policy?”* and *“What is the goal of mainstreaming and is what is actually being produced?”* A comparative analysis of the research body on the topic reveals that a few terms were constantly repeated: *‘high expectations’, ‘doubts’, ‘misunderstanding’, ‘resistance’*. It is readily evident that Gender Mainstreaming, established in 1995 through the Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, is caught in between its high potential and its large dependency on political moods and will.

Imposing the words *gender* and



### **Gender Mainstreaming appropriateness**

The enormous potential of the gender mainstreaming strategy was both a strength and a weakness.

Mainstreaming is not an end in itself while at the same time is no longer optional.

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council 1997

<sup>2</sup> Tools for gender equality, n.d, Available from <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/index-en.htm> (10.09.2016).



## Gender Mainstreaming comprehensiveness

Although the terminology is very clearly defined (‘for women and men’) in advocating gender equality, doubts remain about the way in which gender mainstreaming could be achieved in practice.

*mainstreaming* as ‘conceptual terms’<sup>3</sup> in policies often leads to the opposite of what is desired. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself<sup>4</sup>. The reasons of failure for gender mainstreaming policies range from lack of consideration regarding their successful implementation to the lack of capacity of effective transposition and cultural values – something which significantly brings into question the meaning of these policies<sup>5</sup>. Questioned and critically assessed by feminists, women’s organizations<sup>6</sup> and tested in practice<sup>7</sup>, gender mainstreaming brings different

answers to its goal – to achieve gender equality. Aptly put by Lombardo, “The enormous potential of the strategy was both a strength and a weakness”<sup>8</sup>. Many lost opportunities in the implementation of gender mainstreaming resulted in a misunderstanding of the concept<sup>9</sup>, and many others were ‘learning from mistakes’ and returned to the originally defined notion of these policies. During these processes, the result achieved was an “inadequate focus on achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment”<sup>10</sup>.

Dealing with the issues of how gender mainstreaming can be achieved in practice and maintaining its integration processes at hierarchical positions that were not truly inclusive in the way these policies were foreseen, the issue of understanding becomes also the question ‘for whom’ and – in general – the appropriateness of gender mainstreaming. Although the terminology is very clearly defined (‘for women and men’) in advocating gender equality, it seems that there is still a need for a more precise version “either because the definition of the concept is so vague that actors untrained in gender cannot grasp all its implications or because of the way in which gender mainstreaming campaigners have framed the strategy in their effort to persuade decision makers to accept it”<sup>11</sup>.

In understanding the importance of comprehensiveness of gender mainstreaming, we may take a positive example from the European Parliament. Because of earlier criticism of European institutions’ patriarchal culture<sup>12</sup>, steps have been taken towards including gender mainstreaming in policy frame. The European Parliament has adopted a Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming in the work of the European Parliament (2015/2230(INI)). The importance of this resolution lies in the listed reasons for the decision. Specifically, it is stated that “progress in achieving gender equality in the EU is stagnating and that with this rhythm, this equality will not be achieved for a very long time”

3 Stratigaki, Maria 2005. *Gender mainstreaming vs positive action: an ongoing conflict in EU gender equality policy*, Available from <http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/12/2/165> (30.08.2016.)

4 Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women 2001, *Gender mainstreaming: strategy for promoting gender equality*. Available from [www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf) (30.08.2016.)

5 These trends became evident in comparative research, for example when examining gender mainstreaming vs. positive action, as instruments that are mutually exclusive in practice. Stratigaki states that “almost all analyses of gender mainstreaming agree that it is a strategy that complements but does not replace previous gender-specific equality policies like equal treatment legislation and positive action- the Council of Europe report states clearly that specific gender equality policies (legislation, mechanisms, actions to address specific women’s interests, research and training) are a necessary prerequisite for successful implementation of GM (Council of Europe, 1998: 21). However, in hostile gender equality policy environments (i.e. patriarchal structures of institutional organizations or the prevalence of policy objectives contrary to gender equality, etc.), GM may be conceived and applied as an alternative to positive action and used to downplay the final overall objective of gender equality” (Stratigaki 2005)

6 Stratigaki 2005, Ibid.

7 Mehra, Rekha Gupta, Geeta Rao 2006. *Gender Mainstreaming: Making It Happen*, Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/MehraGuptaGenderMainstreamingMakin>

[gItHappen.pdf](#) (12.09.2016.)

8 Lombardo, Emanuela 2005. Integrating or Setting the Agenda? Gender Mainstreaming in the European Constitution-Making Process, Available from [http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/target/Art%20Chs%20EN/ArtGMEUConst\\_SocPol\\_05EN.pdf](http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/target/Art%20Chs%20EN/ArtGMEUConst_SocPol_05EN.pdf) (22.03.2016.)

9 “In the worst cases gender mainstreaming was interpreted as a replacement for specific gender policies and structures, in spite of warnings by the group of experts of the Council of Europe that this was a misunderstanding of the concept” (Lombardo 2005).

10 UN Economic and Social Council 2010, *Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system Report of the Secretary-General*. Available from [www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/2010/57](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2010/57) (30.08.2016.)

11 Lombardo 2005, Ibid.

12 Stratigaki 2005, Ibid.

---

and that “achieving gender equality by 2030 is the fifth goal of the Sustainable development goals”. Furthermore, it is determined that the “implementation of gender mainstreaming is among major weak points identified by the Commission in its strategy for gender equality 2010-2015 assessment”<sup>13</sup>.

Doubts remain about the way in which gender mainstreaming could be achieved in practice. Still, although it sounds simple, mainstreaming is not about adding on a ‘women’s component’ to an existing activity; in practice, it is not simple at all<sup>14</sup>. It is important to raise awareness on the need for incorporating policies at all levels of decision-making, which challenges the whole policy cycle by introducing a gendered perspective to all phases<sup>15</sup>. While perpetuating the instrumental question *who is this*

*policy for* – needed by all the citizens - women and men, girls and boys<sup>16</sup>, it is important to emphasize that this is an ongoing process. By learning from previous experiences, the focus moves to the very essence of gender equality policy in any area and at all levels, through the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. Going back to the definitions from the initial question, “to whom” is certainly emphasized by “how” – what needs to be changed is targeting policy processes as the main object of change, not ‘women’<sup>17</sup>. Keeping in mind that “gender mainstreaming is no longer optional”<sup>18</sup>, we should maintain high expectations but not irrespectively of political will or current preferred policy.

---

13 Gačanica, Lejla 2016. *Gender Mainstreaming in the work of the European parliament*. Available from <https://womencitizensforconstitutionalreform.wordpress.com/2016/08/08/gender-mainstreaming-in-the-work-of-the-european-parliament/> (01.09.2016.)

14 In *Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nation's system* (UN Economic and Social Council, 2010) under Chapter V remaining gaps and challenges stands out, noticed through an analysis of the implementation of gender mainstreaming, the lack of uniform understanding of the term and, as a result, inadequate focus on achieving gender equality.

15 Stratigaki 2005, *Ibid*.

---

16 European Institute for Gender Equality n.d, *What is Gender Mainstreaming*. Available from <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming> (10.09.2016.)

17 Verloo, Mieke 2004. *Understanding gender mainstreaming in terms of power*, Available from [www.rosadoc.be/athena/pdf/verloo.pdf](http://www.rosadoc.be/athena/pdf/verloo.pdf) (12.09.2016.)

18 UN Women 2014. *Gender Mainstreaming In Development Programming: Guidance Note*, New York.